

# ALSE and Air Warrior 25 Years of Service to the Warfighter

By Debi Dawson



LTC John S. "Shannon" Womack, product manager for Air Warrior, highlighted some of the accomplishments of the air warrior team over the past year to conference attendees.

The Aviation Life Support Equipment (ALSE) Users Conference celebrated the 25th anniversary of integrated aviation safety in August in Huntsville, Ala. The conference, hosted by Product Manager Air Warrior (PM-AW), the organization responsible for managing most of the survival gear given to Army aviators, focused on the importance of ALSE to the continued success of the Army.

John Jolly, logistics chief for the Air Warrior product office and emcee for this event, explained the importance of this benchmark. "The 25th (anniversary) is significant to show to the user the longevity within the ALSE community that there is one entity that takes care of life support equipment," Jolly said.

William Brower, acting project manager for Soldier Warrior, opened the conference with a brief history of air warrior, a program formed in 1983 that originally was called Product Manager ALSE and was based in St. Louis, Mo. PM-ALSE was moved under Program Executive Office (PEO) for Aviation in 1987. In 1994, ALSE was expanded and upgraded to a project manager office. In 1997, PEO Aviation moved to Redstone Arsenal, Ala., taking with it PM-

ALSE, which has been renamed PM Air Crew Integrated Systems (PM-ACIS). In 2002, PM-ACIS was moved under PEO Soldier and in 2003 was renamed PM-Air Warrior and assigned to Project Manager Soldier Warrior.

From the early drawings and concepts in 1995 to the first air warrior ensemble fielding in 2004, the Army has been moving toward an integrated aviation ensemble. The current Increment III ensemble fully addresses that need. Brower said the air warrior ensemble "increases performance, mobility, duration, comfort and safety" of the aircrew in and out of the aircraft.

LTC John S. Womack, product manager for AW, provided an update on the activities of the Air Warrior office over the past year.

The air warrior ensemble is now fielded to all active Army combat aviation brigades and air cavalry squadrons and to deploying National Guard units at home stations. In 2008, the air warrior ensemble and the electronic data manager, a kneeboard that helps Army helicopter pilots navigate using Blue Force Tracking, were fielded to the 2nd Inf. Div. Additionally, Army ground forces, other branch ser-



William "Bill" Brower, acting program manager for Soldier Warrior, opens the Aviation Life Support Equipment Users Conference and gives a brief history on the evolution of Army aviation safety equipment.

vices and foreign militaries are purchasing the air warrior system.

Speakers at the conference continually stressed the importance of ALSE to the Army community, and no one can attest to that better than retired CW4 Skip Tackett, a former Army helicopter pilot and guest speaker. Tackett was involved in a refueling fire in his AH-64 Apache helicopter in 1994.

He explained that the flame-resistant Nomex uniform he was wearing saved his life. The portion of his body that was not protected by Nomex received third-degree burns for which he later had to have skin grafts, while the areas covered by Nomex had less severe burns.

MAJ Clay Williamson, assistant product manager for Clothing and Individual Equipment (CIE), stressed the importance of recent advancements in flame resistance to the aviation community. "CIE is responsible for all uniforms, the foundation for all aviation safety. The aviators lead the Army in

clothing safety. By coming to the ALSE conference and getting feedback from the experts, the Army aviators, we are able to provide better flame-resistant products,” Williams said, “The ALSE conference is a great opportunity for the different PMs, like CIE and AW, to work with one another, to ensure there are no compatibility issues.”

The ALSE conference gave Soldiers a venue to give feedback to the Army’s product developers as well as to the vendors who make some of the equipment. The conference’s exhibition hall hosted more than 50 vendors who showcased the latest aviation equipment.

One Soldier said the Army needs to recognize the contributions that ALSE makes. “This conference can help us get more funding to get the equipment we need. It is a venue for informing the Soldiers, letting them see different vendors and see what options are out there,” said CW2 Paul Fekete, an Apache pilot from Fort Bragg, N.C.

“I can take back this information to my commander, brief it to my leadership,” said SSG Lisa Thomas, an ALSE coordinator with the Army National Guard, “The ALSE conference allows me to get good points of contact, gives me the ability to network, to give each other ideas.”

During an open ALSE panel dis-

cussion at the conference, CW2 John M. Martinez with the 82nd Cbt. Avn. Bde. at Fort Bragg described the current state of aviation safety to representatives from PM-AW, PM-CIE, the U.S. Army Aeromedical Research Laboratory, and the Concepts and Requirements Directorate for the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence.

“The ALSE program has gotten its black belt. But just like in karate, once it has been established, it is just the beginning of the training,” Martinez said.

“The ALSE program needs to have continual training and awareness. I want to utilize all of my resources to ensure all of my crew members have what they need. I need to make sure they have the full support of their commanders,” he said, “I want to setup one of the best ALSE programs. You guys are the heart and soul of the ALSE community. I hope that I am involved in the first ALSE military occupation specialty.”

The need for an ALSE MOS was an echoed theme throughout the conference. Although there are ALSE coordinators in aviation units, there are still no jobs that focus solely on aviation safety.

Martinez added that the Army must have “real estate, personnel, funds and support” to make any program

work and ALSE is no different. “If you are missing one of these things, you cannot prosper. You need to provide the best equipment and the best training. Without an MOS for ALSE, it cannot prosper,” Martinez said.

The feedback from the field on air warrior and other aviation safety equipment has been so positive that other countries have started to take notice. Military cooperation between the United States and its allies has been essential to the continued success in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Chad Plumeier, with the Army Aviation Systems Program Office in Australia, explained that the Australian army has been using air warrior since 2006 and that about 50 sets are in theater now. “The guys love it. All of the feedback is that the system is great,” Plumeier said, “Other aircrews want it.” He said that the ALSE conference was “very informative.”

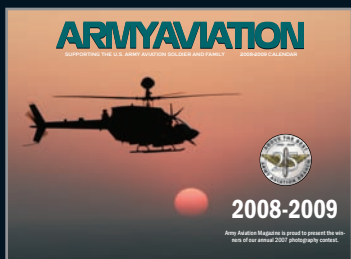
“It was great to catch up with the Air Warrior project team. It is good to have a liaison with them. The ability to have an integrated system—that is the greatest benefit of Air Warrior,” Plumeier said.



*Debi Dawson is the director of strategic communications for the Program Executive Office for Soldier at Fort Belvoir, Va.*

# photo contest

Sponsored by ARMY AVIATION Magazine.



Twelve cash prizes will be awarded for **1st place (\$500)**, **2nd (\$300)**, **3rd (\$200)**, **4th (\$100)**, and eight honorable mentions of \$50 each for the best shots that reflect an Army Aviation subject or theme.

Winners to be published in the magazine and in the Army Aviation calendar distributed at the AAAA Annual Convention. Contest is open to current AAAA members in good standing at time of entry. Persons who are not AAAA members may participate by joining AAAA.

Photographs must have been taken during calendar year 2008. Entries must be received by *January 9, 2009*.

Visit the AAAA website at [www.quad-a.org](http://www.quad-a.org) for complete rules and entry form.

